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EPA ISSUES NEW TOXICS REPORT, IMPROVES MEANS OF REPORTING

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today released its annual report on the amount of toxic releases discharged by facilities throughout the country. The Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) for 1999, the year of the most recent data, shows continued good news with decreases in emissions in several industries. The Agency also announced steps being taken to make it easier for industry to meet reporting requirements.

“This inventory is a powerful tool for helping to protect public health and the environment. I am pleased at the significant progress being made as trends continue downward. We continue to have high quality information to analyze and provide to citizens,” said EPA Administrator Christie Whitman. “Americans are reaping considerable benefits from the TRI program. We’re seeing constant decreases of emissions to air, land and water, especially in the manufacturing industries where there has been a 46 percent decrease over the 12-year history of the program.”

To facilitate industry reporting requirements, EPA has introduced a new computer software product, “TRIAL”, which provides reporting facilities easier access to all TRI reporting regulations and guidance on interpreting those regulations. This system is available on EPA’s TRI website and is included in the software package provided to companies for the reporting process required by Congress under the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act of 1986 (EPCRA).

The EPCRA law requires industrial facilities each year to publicly report the quantities of toxic chemicals released into the air, water and land. EPA analyzes the submitted data. Overall, the TRI includes information on releases and other wastes for 644 toxic chemicals and chemical compounds.

There has been a chemical emissions decrease of 46 percent in the manufacturing industries, about 1.5 billion pounds over the 12-year history of the program. The one-year decrease from 1998 to 1999 was 2.5 percent.

TRI data include chemicals released as waste into the air, water or land, and other types of waste management, such as the chemicals that are recycled, burned for energy recovery or treated, both on-site and off-site.

Looking at all types of wastes, the total quantity increased by five percent or almost one billion pounds since facilities began reporting other waste management data in 1991. The one-year increase from 1998 to 1999 was 323 million pounds or 1.4 percent.

Of those industries which began making TRI reports beginning for 1998 emissions, coal mining facilities reported a 9.7 percent decrease in releases from 1998 to 1999 and petroleum terminals and bulk storage facilities a 5.5 percent decrease in releases.

The largest increase in total releases from 1998 to 1999 was reported by metal mining—an increase of 416.3 million pounds or 11.7 percent.

For chemical wholesale distributors, total releases from 1998 to 1999 increased by 28.3 percent (435,000 pounds), waste treatment, storage and disposal facilities by 2.7 percent (7.5 million pounds) and electric generating facilities by 2.2 percent (24.9 million pounds).

The largest volume of chemical releases for all industries was reported by facilities in Nevada, followed by Utah, Arizona, Alaska, Texas, Ohio, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Illinois, in that order.

The TRI program, adhering to the EPCRA law, began by covering the manufacturing industry and subsequently adding other industries. TRI annual reports reflect releases and other waste management activities of chemicals, not exposures of the public to those chemicals. The release estimates alone are not sufficient to determine exposure or to calculate potential adverse effects on human health and the environment. The determination of potential risk depends upon many factors, including toxicity, chemical fate after release, release location, and population concentrations.

The 1999 Toxics Release Inventory data and background information on the TRI program are available at: <http://www.epa.gov/tri>

A special research tool, TRI EXPLORER, is available on a link from the web page. It provides county-by-county assessments of the data. The public also can sort the data by facility, chemical, geographic areas or industry, and at the state or national level. The availability of these data make it possible to gauge a facility's progress in reducing toxic chemical pollution.